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# Healthy ecosystem key to water availability, food security – UNEP

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According to a report entitled "An Ecosystems Approach to Water and Food Security" conducted by the **United Nations Environment Program**, proper management and investing in the ecosystem can help avoid water scarcity and provide food security while improving climate change resilience and boosting community incomes.

Examples of such method are diversifying crops, planting trees on farmland and improving rainwater collection.

Based on the findings of the report, **maintaining healthy ecosystems** to ensure water availability and other ecosystem services, like water purification and flood regulation, is key to long-term food security. However, many ecosystems are under stress due to water withdrawals from agricultural use and other purposes.

In addition, climate change also poses a threat in terms of worsening the situation in many areas, with effects like droughts, heat waves, floods, and severe storms which lead to an uncertain future for **food security**.

Current intensive farming methods which cause pollution from agricultural run-off or the diversion of water from rivers to farmlands have come at the expense of the ecosystem. But with the use of an ecosystems-based approach to agriculture, the report said that the balance can be restored.

However, for balance to be restored, changes must be done in the areas of environmental protection, **water resources management**, and food production. Changes in these areas are needed to improve food security and reduce stresses on water supply.

### Shifting our focus

When it comes to environmental protection, the report suggested shifting the focus from protecting discrete ecosystems to managing larger landscapes.

Calling on ministries of environment to act, the authors said that environmental ministers should increase awareness of the role ecosystem services play in water and food security. At the same time, ministers should promote more considered evaluation of potential trade-offs related with food security and planning and encourage better cooperation with other sectors.

In managing water resources, the report suggests that when allocating resources and planning land and water development, ecosystem services must be noted so as to avoid trade-offs that are detrimental to long-term water and food security.

In terms of food production, food production systems must be viewed as agro-ecosystems, or lands that are sources of food as well as perform diverse **ecosystem services**.

With this approach, it will be easier to identify opportunities for synergies among crops, fish, livestock, tree and forest products which can lead to increase in the amount of food produced without increasing the amount of land and water resources used.

Backed by the **International Water Management Institute**, a non-profit organization focused on improving land and water resources management, the report was launched during the World Water Week in Stockholm, Sweden. (*L.J. Polintan*)

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